

SERVING

Volunteer Spotlight: Anita Naylor



Long-time volunteer Anita Naylor explains the joy of connecting with a child with special needs.

Whether mopping the kitchen or singing in chapel, Anita Naylor serves with a smile on her face. A long-time member of McLean Bible Church, Anita has served our families as a buddy volunteer and chapel leader since 2011. Read this short interview and discover why she loves serving at Jill's House.

1. Why do you serve at Jill's House?

I have wanted to work with kids with special needs since 1970, when I was a substitute special education teacher at Franconia Elementary School. Several years later, I worked at a state-owned training center in Northern Virginia. This was before the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990 so the facility was cold and sterile. It broke my heart. During those years I envisioned a place like Jill's House--a warm, beautiful place for children to have fun and be inspired.

2. What has serving at Jill's House taught you?

Jill's House has taught my family and me so much about the disability community. It's a place that prioritizes compassionate service, which is tough to find in our affluent culture. It's a place that models the truth that it is better to be last than first.

3. What has surprised you about serving at Jill's House?

I'm surprised by the unity and teamwork that permeates the entire facility. Everyone works so well together, and I've never heard a disagreeable word. The staff and volunteers are so focused on serving the children. They don't have time for petty jealousies, disagreements or irritations. The second surprise comes during our prayer times in chapel. It doesn't matter what kind of day it is or which children join us for chapel, the room always falls quiet when we pray. It never fails.

4. Do you have a favorite memory of volunteering at Jill's House?

One of the boys at Jill's House and I have a really special connection. He has autism, can't talk and often struggles to connect with others. He often seems far away in his own world, and I knew that I'd never make a connection with him if I waited for him to enter my world. So, I found a way to enter his.

One afternoon, we were watching *Snow White* together. Actually, we were watching one scene from *Snow White* over and over again. It was the scene when the witch tempts Snow White with the apple. He seemed fascinated by the scene, and every time the scene ended, he would wind the tape back to watch it again.

So, I helped make his favorite scene come to life. I became the witch, mimicked her voice and offered him an imaginary apple. He looked at me and laughed out loud. That was the first time I heard him laugh, and we belly laughed together for half an hour.

Now, every time I see him at Jill's House, I remind him of our connection by singing a song from *Snow White*, either "Heigh-Ho" or "Some Day My Prince Will Come." Then, he'll look me in the

eye, smile and relax a bit. I think we both enjoy that memory we share.

5. What would you say to someone who is considering volunteering at Jill's House?

Go for it! It's so rewarding. Volunteering at Jill's House has become one of my favorite things to do during the week. The children have added so much joy and delight to my life, and I wouldn't give it up for anything!

To learn more about serving at Jill's House, visit jillshouse.org/serve or email maryrachel.robbsins@jillshouse.org.

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